

Historical Perspective of Public Transportation in Washington State

The 1960s — A Beginning

The organizational framework for public transportation has altered since the state legislature first authorized cities to levy a household tax to support public transportation in 1965.

Federal grants to public entities to construct transit facilities and purchase equipment for mass transportation began with the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development administered these grants.

At that time, public transportation was limited to a few cities. Private bus companies provided public transportation in several cities and regionally out of Seattle. Private intercity bus carriers provided service along many state highways.

As costs increased, fare revenues failed to keep up, and subsidies did not appear. Private bus companies gradually abandoned local public transportation service in cities and suburbs. As the interstate highway system evolved and by-passed smaller cities and towns, private intercity bus carriers steadily withdrew service from them.

Some cities responded immediately with their new taxing authority, often contracting with a private operator. Yakima was the state's first city to enact a local tax for public transportation purposes — a household tax in 1966. Public transportation service disappeared in other locales. Private nonprofit organizations filled these voids, serving the elderly, persons with mental disabilities, and persons with low incomes. They pioneered a new method of service using smaller vehicles — Dial a Ride, also known as paratransit.

1969 was a standout year for state public transportation law. The state legislature authorized:

- Metropolitan municipal corporations — the first special purpose district to address service outside of cities;
- Local sales taxes for public transportation purposes — subject to local voters' approval; and
- Local preemption of the state Motor Vehicle Excise Tax for public transportation purposes — subject to a match from an equal level of locally collected tax revenue.

The 1970s — A Time of Trials

1971 saw the state legislature extend local sales taxes for public transportation purposes to cities, subject to local voters' approval.

Voters in King County authorized the metropolitan municipality to levy the state's first local sales tax for public transportation purposes in September 1972.

In 1973, Congress authorized the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to make grants for rural highway public transportation demonstration projects. FHWA funded two projects in Washington State from 1977-1979: City of Prosser and Grays Harbor Transportation Authority.

The National Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1974 authorized the newly created Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) to make grants for operating assistance to governmental public transportation operators in urbanized areas.

When the metropolitan municipal corporation model failed to catch on statewide, local governments persuaded the state legislature to enable other special purpose districts to provide public transportation, county transportation authorities in 1974, and public transportation benefit areas in 1975. This included extending their access to local sales tax and the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax funding.

Introduction

Public transportation benefit areas seemed to appear as federal and state program funding for transporting target groups — the elderly, persons with mental disabilities, and persons with low incomes — declined significantly. Interest in regional public transportation services increased with population growth.

Voters in Grays Harbor County approved its transportation authority to levy a local sales tax for public transportation purposes in November 1974. Voters in Centralia, Chehalis, and a couple of Lewis County precincts joined in November 1976 in authorizing a household tax to support the state's first public transportation benefit area.

Congress passed the Surface Transportation Assistance Act in 1978, which, among other things, established a formula allocation for funding for public transportation projects in rural areas.

There were six cities operating or subsidizing public transportation services at the beginning of this decade. At its end, there were 16 local governments, including five new cities and six new special public transportation districts. Statewide public transportation ridership increased every year in the 1970s.

The 1980s — A Decade of Expansion

Building upon the state's authorization legislation and broader federal funding, there were only four cities but 12 special districts providing public transportation services by 1990.

There were mostly nominal changes to federal public transportation laws in the 1982 Surface Transportation Assistance Act and the Surface Transportation and Uniform Relocation Assistance Act of 1987. Generally, these changes added requirements for grantees and authorized more funding. The 1982 Act funded part of the authorization for public transportation expenditures from the Highway Trust Fund.

At the state level, the state legislature made no significant adjustments to state laws pertaining to public transportation.

Statewide ridership on public transportation operations stayed at about the same level over the 1980s until 1988 when there was a sizeable increase.

The first major technological change to public transportation operations came with the introduction of 60-foot articulated buses by King County Metro in 1980.

The 1990s — A Decade of Change

An adjustment for public transportation, as well as all other public services, came with the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This Act increased accessibility of disabled persons by causing a redesign of vehicles, services, and facilities to accommodate them.

The state legislature made several significant changes to the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax in 1990. It:

- reduced the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax that could be used for local public transportation purposes;
- established a sales tax equalization account for those public transportation systems with low performing sales tax collections; and
- established the High Capacity Transportation Account to fund the planning of passenger rail and high occupancy transportation systems.

In 1992, the state legislature authorized regional transit authorities — the first new type of special purpose district to provide public transportation since 1975.

The beginning of the decade saw new public transportation benefit areas established and funded, and further annexations to existing areas. Four new public transportation benefit areas appeared by 1997 — the most recent being Grant Transit Authority. Not coincidentally, the most recent annexations to public transportation benefit areas occurred in 1998.

However, beginning in 1994, Washington State began to see voters' rejection of new public transportation benefit areas. Voters rejected five new areas from 1994 to 1998 — the most recent being in Klickitat County. There have been no new public transportation benefit areas funded or any annexations to them since 1998.

The electorate was changing statewide. The state's voters approved Initiative 573 to effect term limits for certain elected officials in 1992. The following year they approved Initiative 601 that limited the rate of growth of state government expenditures. There were several efforts to repeal or revise the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax by statewide initiative beginning in 1997 and culminating successfully with Initiative 695 approved by the state's voters in 1999.

Statewide ridership on public transportation operations continued to increase throughout the 1990s.

The New Millenium — A Decade of New Relationships

While state courts reviewed the legality of Initiative 695, Washington State repealed the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax. The immediate effect was the loss of funding to the High Capacity Transportation Account. Due to accounting procedures, loss of sales tax equalization account did not happen until 2001. In the meantime, the state legislature appropriated \$80 million in "Bridge" funding to assist local governmental public transportation systems in adjusting to the drop in state-share revenues from the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax.

Local public transportation operators economized services in response to the loss of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax. In addition, they either:

- continued services to reduce reserve accounts;
- sought federal funding to replace the lost funding; or
- sought voters' approval to increase local tax revenues.

It will be another two or three years before several local governmental public transportation systems seriously reduce their reserve accounts.

Seven systems in small city or rural areas have turned to increased federal funding of their operations.

Eight of nine local governmental public transportation systems succeeded in the past two years. At least four more will seek voters' approval to increase local tax revenues in 2002.

Today there are 26 local governmental public transportation systems — 19 of which are public transportation benefit areas. The statewide map in this chapter displays the location and service areas of these systems.

The Annual Summary of Public Transportation

Background

The annual summary is a report on the status of public transportation in Washington State. The Public Transportation and Rail Division of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) prepares this summary. The intent for this summary, required by Section 35.58.2796 RCW, is to provide uniform data to transit providers, the Legislative Transportation Committees, and local and regional governments.

Organization of the Summary

This year's summary presents:

- WSDOT programs and services.
- Each local governmental public transportation system's operating characteristics, services, achievements in 2001, objectives for 2002, and plans through 2008.
- Statewide operating and financial statistics in appendices.

Introduction

The local governmental public transportation systems appear alphabetically in separate chapters organized as follows:

Urbanized

- C-TRAN
- Community Transit
- Everett Transit
- King County Metro Transit
- Pierce Transit
- Sound Transit
- Spokane Transit Authority

Small City

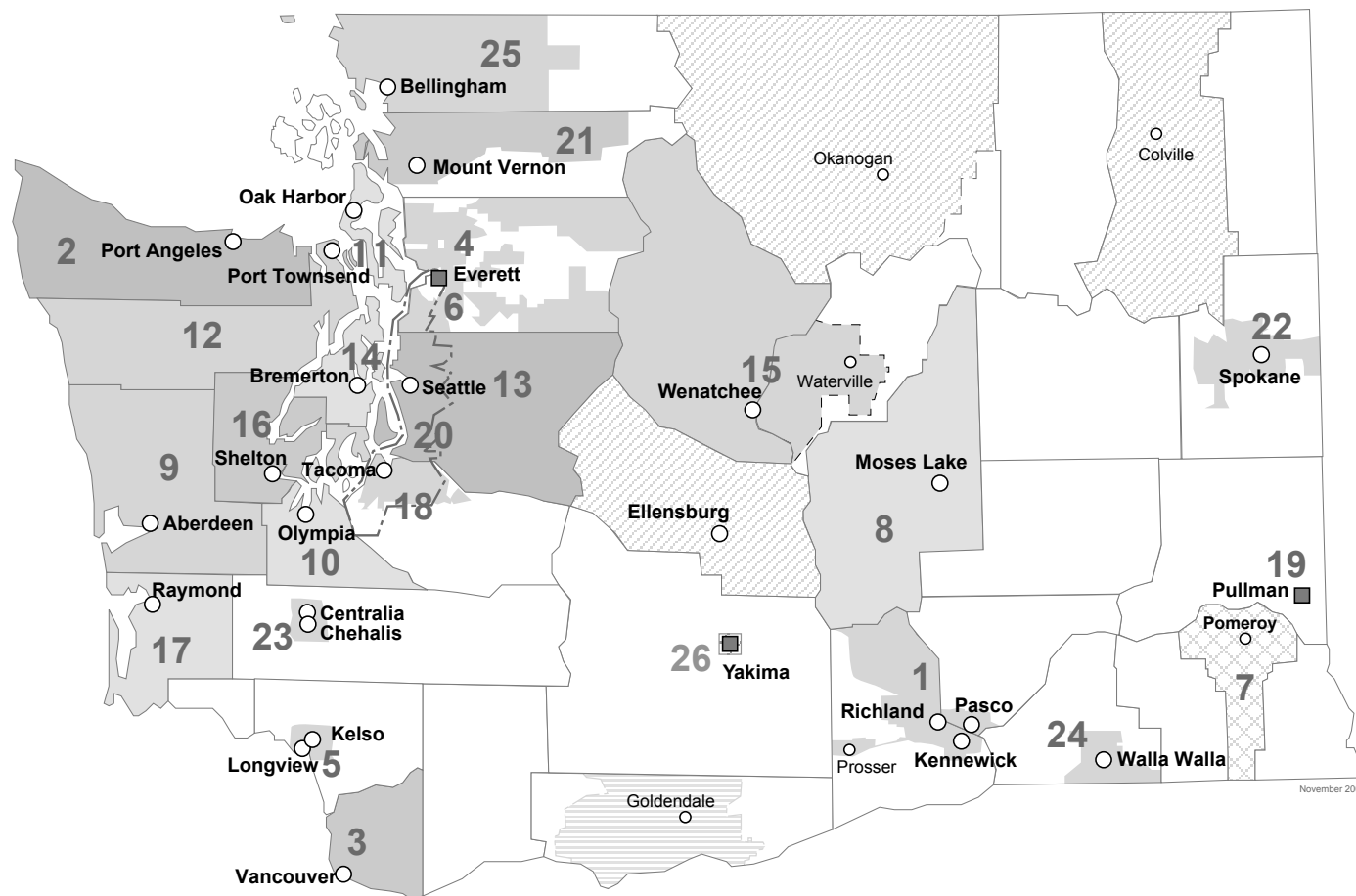
- Ben Franklin Transit
- Cowlitz Transit Authority d.b.a. CUBS
- Intercity Transit
- Kitsap Transit
- Whatcom Transportation Authority
- Yakima Transit

Rural

- Clallam Transit System
- Garfield County
- Grant Transit Authority
- Grays Harbor Transportation Authority
- Island Transit
- Jefferson Transit Authority
- Link Transit
- Mason County Transportation Authority
- Pacific Transit
- Pullman Transit
- Skagit Transit
- Twin Transit
- Valley Transit

Washington State Public Transportation

Transit Authorities



Legend

Transit Systems

- Regional Systems
- City Systems
- Unincorporated County
- Transportation Benefit Area
- PTBAs that have been formed but are inactive.
- PTBAs that have been formed and are in the planning process.
- Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority boundary

- 1 Ben Franklin Transit (Benton-Franklin Counties)
- 2 Clallam Transit
- 3 C-TRAN (Clark County)
- 4 Community Transit (Snohomish County)
- 5 Cowlitz Transit Authority (Longview/Kelso)
- 6 Everett Transit
- 7 Garfield County Transportation
- 8 Grant Transit Authority
- 9 Grays Harbor Transportation Authority
- 10 Intercity Transit (Thurston County)
- 11 Island Transit
- 12 Jefferson Transit Authority
- 13 King County Metro
- 14 Kitsap Transit
- 15 Link (Chelan-Douglas Counties)
- 16 Mason County Transportation Authority
- 17 Pacific Transit System
- 18 Pierce Transit
- 19 Pullman Transit
- 20 Central Puget Sound RTA
- 21 Skagit Transit Authority
- 22 Spokane Transit Authority
- 23 Twin Transit (Lewis County)
- 24 Valley Transit (Walla Walla County)
- 25 Whatcom Transportation Authority
- 26 Yakima Transit

